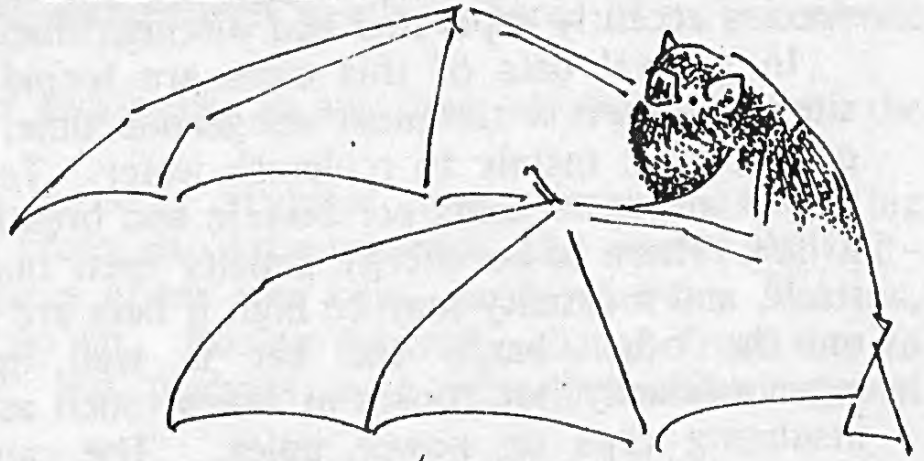


Castlemaine Naturalist

April 1994

#199 Vol.18.2



Bats COMMON BENTWING

Field Day at Huntly

Land for Wildlife invited members of Landcare groups and others to attend a field day on bats at Huntly on March 9th. Some 70 people, including a contingent of secondary students, appeared at the Huntly Hall at 2.30p.m, just after a drenching shower which did not seem like bat weather. As the major part of proceedings was an indoor talk and slide show, followed by a tasty dinner, not all was necessarily to be lost to the weather, however.

The talk was to be given by Lindy Lumsden, the C.N.R. Bat Woman (as the leaflet styles her). She has been studying bats for a number of years, and her diligent field work has turned up many surprises. Her introductory remarks referred to the increasing presence of fruit bats in Victoria, in particular the Grey-headed and the Little Red, known around Melbourne, Shepparton and elsewhere - and they don't have to survive on orchard fruit.

Though insectivorous bats are to be found practically everywhere, city and country, they are mostly overlooked. Nine species are known in the Bendigo area. There are always bats where there are trees, even isolated stands in pasture. Indeed, such stands are favourite feeding grounds, the bats often flying kilometres from bushland roosts to patrol them nightly.

The typical insectivorous bat is a little fellow of some 10-20g, and not much bigger than your thumb. Species mentioned as common were Lesser Long-eared, Little Mastiff, Gould's Wattle, Little Forest, White Striped Mastiff and Common Bentwing. A good catch from a trap around Bendigo might be 30 bats representing 7 species - and those are the ones favouring that particular altitude, for there are ground-feeders, feeders above the canopy, and levels between. Lindy had a tame example to display ("Not a pet! but he's been handled by humans for 5 years and he's very blasé.") He put up with much passing from hand to hand without taking to flight or using those sharp little insectivorous teeth, although when out of Lindy's hands he displayed a certain restlessness and a desire to creep into people's clothing. While he was crawling with

thumbs and hind feet it wasn't obvious that he possessed wings, but these Lindy had shown us extended - yet another indignity patiently suffered. I understood he was a "free-tail" belonging to one of three species recently separated and distinguishable only by minute study.

In general bats of this class are torpid in winter, seeking out cool sites. Winter is the most dangerous time, when excursions occur only occasionally, mainly to replenish water. Temperature falls to 9°C, heart rate is a low 40 beats per minute and breathing one breath per hour and a half. There is an energy penalty each time the bat is forced to rouse itself, and mortality may be high if bats are often disturbed. In summer, on the other hand, the bat is well into overdrive. It favours extraordinarily hot roosts at times, such as the ridges of iron roofs or insulating caps on power poles. The rate of development of young depends on temperature, and the females clearly prefer to speed this process. At peak activity the heart rate can rise to 1000 beats per minute. Notwithstanding the frenzy of summer, bats are long-lived, up to 20 years, with females bearing one (sometimes two) young annually. New-born bats are advanced, weighing 30% of mother's body weight, and reaching maturity in a few weeks. Mum has to teach them how to fly and feed, and will pick up a youngster of about her own size from the ground and launch it for a second attempt at flight. So they are very tough little customers.

Not surprisingly, bats are our most common native mammals, and in most cases are maintaining their numbers. Farming practices - insecticides apart - probably favour them. Predation is only occasional. Some birds take a few by loitering near roosting sites as bats emerge, but once in flight they are too elusive to be caught. Cats catch a few near-ground feeders.

Knowledge of bat distribution has improved in the last 20 years because of more intensive observation, assisted by the modern bat-trap, tagging and radio tracking. The bat trap is an aluminium frame standing 3m high, in which a series of vertical nylon lines are held under tension. The lines are thought to be undetectable to bats, although some bats are seen to check and avoid them. Those bats which hit them slide down the lines into a canvas trough suspended below. The bats, unable to take off in a confined situation, crawl up the sides, but encounter a plastic flap which they cannot crawl over, but which they are willing to hide beneath. The trap may be left unattended for hours at a time.

Tags are attached to the forewing - which corresponds to the human forearm - and can sometimes be read without disturbing a roosting bat. Radio transmitters, where used, are attached by glue to the bat's shoulder area. Since a bat may weigh only 7 g and the design weight is not above 10% of body weight, transmitters must be light indeed. Lindy showed us a slide of a bat fitted with one. We couldn't see the transmitter proper, but were disconcerted to see a stiff wire sticking out, about as long as the bat. Lindy responded to inquiries from worried

bat-lovers by pointing out

a) the bats seemed not to notice the transmitter

b) the knowledge gained seemed well worth a degree of inconvenience to individual bats

c) it would fall off after two weeks in any case, at about the time the battery went flat.

The transmitters have certainly revealed some surprising roosting sites. Bats mostly like to creep into little crannies, like cracks and bolt-holes in fence posts, fissures under tree bark, nests of Fairy Martins, engine exhaust pipes and so on. Roosts generally change from day to day, for reasons unclear, but perhaps as a wise precaution against predators.

After the talk and the following dinner, we travelled in convoy to the property of Trevor Arnell some kilometers distant, where a trial of the bat-traps was to be made. This was a new location for trapping, and no doubt capable of yielding much information to science, but the weather, although no longer outright stormy, was cool. Nobody was in any way troubled by mosquitos or moths, and no waving of powerful torches by the student contingent and younger fry revealed any bats. We watched with interest the setting up of the traps and, since this was the actual field part of the field day, waited on into darkness. Eventually Lindy set off for a tour of other traps previously set up, followed by the torch bearers, but your correspondent, faint of heart, returned home. I learned subsequently that two Little Forester bats were found in the final stages of packing up.

Bob Webb.

Sandon, February '94

Birds

Australasian Grebe
White Faced Heron
Brown Falcon
Masked Lapwing
Common Bronzewing
Galah
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Crimson Rosella
Shining Bronze-cuckoo
Australian Owlet-nightjar
Kookaburra
Welcome Swallow
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Scarlet Robin
Rufous Whistler
Grey Shrike-thrush
Restless Flycatcher

Grey Fantail
Willie Wagtail
Superb Blue-wren
Speckled Warbler
Weebill
Brown,
Buff-rumped,
Yellow-rumped,
Yellow and
Striated Thornbills
Varied Sitella
White-throated Treecreeper
Red Wattlebird
Yellow-faced,
Yellow-tufted,
Fuscous,
White-plumed,

Brown-headed and
White-naped Honeyeaters
Spotted Pardalote
Striated Pardalote
Red-browed Firetail
Diamond Firetail

White-winged Chough
Australian Magpie-lark
Magpie
Grey Currawong
Australian Raven

In a quiet month, there has been frequent mixed flocks of Pardalotes, including many juveniles, at the bird bath.

Animals

Yellow-footed Antechinus seen drinking at the bird bath.

Echidna

Dead Sugar-glider 20/2

Common Brush-tailed possum

Bat species.

Susanna Starr.

Lake Wyn Wyn Appeal

This appeal is being conducted by the Lake Wyn Wyn Appeal Committee and the Victorian Conservation Trust. They are trying to raise by public appeal \$22,000 to purchase 65 hectares of private land on the north-west margin of the lake. This land is mostly covered with regenerating Salt Paperbark and Samphire flats, both endangered eco-systems in the Wimmera. The Club invites members to send a personal donation. It can be claimed as a tax deduction if over \$2.

Further information can be obtained from, and donations sent to , Mr Richard Alcorn,

Chairperson, Lake Wyn Wyn Appeal
Committee

17 Lawrence St.

Horsham. 3400.

Following the Mitchell Trail

For a number of years since reading the second edition of Major Thomas Mitchell's journals both Doug and I have been interested in following up some of the places Mitchell explored. A few years ago we went to the Arapiles to try and discover some of the features that he drew, and they weren't hard to recognise. We took slides, and the one from the lookout across Mitre Lake and Mitre Rock are certainly comparable.

About two years ago I was given the book on the Mitchell Trail put out by C&E and we have been checking out parts of it from time to time. Because Doug wants to give a talk on the area from Mt Greenock to Mt

Alexander we set off one afternoon to visit and climb Mt Greenock, which is only about 5 km from Talbot. We approached via Cameron's Crossing on Tulleroop Creek and past Mt Cameron, on the Mt Cameron/Talbot Road. Along there we came on an interesting bluestone ruin and stopped to have a look. It was built a bit like it had been a hall, but there were narrow slits that look for all the world like the slits for rifles. Is it some sort of defence built in the days when the pioneers feared the aboriginals?

Further on, after we'd followed on to Red Lion Road, we came across a dam at the side of the road where there were quite a number of water birds, which unfortunately very quickly headed for the thick reeds when we stopped, but not before I identified dusky moorhens, and grebes. There is another dam worth stopping to see a bit further on, and there is a very interesting patch of bush which invites exploration, especially in spring. We came out on the road to Clunes just south of Red Lion, and a little north of Dunach with Mt Glasgow to the south east and Mt Greenock to the south west. The first road we tried was the wrong one, so we had to turn around and head back into Dunach and then towards Talbot. Much of the problem lay in the fact that we were following the Trail back-to-front! We found the Union Mine Site which is a Geological Reserve and the beginning of the "trail" up Mt Greenock. There is a trail as far as the stile over the fence, but then you choose your own, or the one the animals have made - Mt Greenock is on private property, but the public is welcome to climb it. It is well worth the effort, too. The first time we climbed it we saw Pipets and ravens, the next time Magpies, ravens and a kestrel, so the bird life isn't an attraction. I didn't recognise any wild plants other than what I think are tree violets down near the bottom, so the plants aren't the attraction, but, the views from the top near the Cairn are really worth the climb. On the north eastern horizon is Mitchell's Mt Byng (Mt Alexander), to the south west is the Mitchell Plateau and Mt William. To the South east are the Mameloid Hills he speaks of, and has drawn. Again we took slides, and had no difficulty in recognising the features he had drawn. He was certainly a man of many talents.

I hope to be able to take the Club on this part of the Trail on the May excursion, and if there is time, those who are feeling energetic might be able to climb Mt Greenock. It took us 20 minutes, and we were away from the car for about 45 minutes.

Rita Mills

Observations

Sugar Glider, half grown, found dead at Sandon and brought to the meeting for identification. (R.W.)

Two Rufous Whistlers were seen in the south end of Farnsworth Street. (S.B.)

Juvenile Nankeen Night-herons. Two were seen at Bells Swamp on the

bird count day by the four observers who went. They were perching in a Red Gum about 20-30 metres from the water's edge.

At Barrinhup on the same day another one was seen on a fallen branch in the river, only 6 or 7 metres from the bank. While we watched it darted over to the bank to catch something right at the edge of the water.(E.P.)

During the month another one was seen at the Botanical Gardens. (S.B.)

Royal Spoonbill seen from the train on 6/3/94 on a dam near Elphinstone.(R.M.)

White-throated Needletails. Half a dozen were seen at North Castlemaine flying just above the tree-tops on the evening of 24/3. (R.M.) but there were dozens seen in Little Bendigo on the same evening at roof-top level.. (C.M.)

Whistling Kites, one seen at Little Bendigo (C.M.) and one seen at North Harcourt. (G.B.)

Little Eagle seen and heard calling at North Harcourt, also Wedgetailed Eagles in the same area. (G.B.)

Parson's Bands One solitary specimen seen in the centre of a hard beaten track in the Expedition Pass area. (S.P.)

Birds at Bells Swamp 1/3/94

Black Swans and cygnets

Masked Lapwings (30)

Pacific Herons

Yellow-billed Spoonbills (24)

Superb Blue Wrens

White Cockatoos

Longbilled Correllas

Swamp Harrier

Little Eagle

Brown Falcon

Whistling Kite

Willy Wagtail

Australian Shelduck

Black Ducks

Grey Teal

Little Pied Cormorants

Greater Black Cormorant

Greater Egret

White Ibis

Straw-necked Ibis

Nankeen Night Heron, imm.

White-plumed Honeyeaters

Red Wattlebird

Tree Martins

Magpies

Mudlark

Australian Raven

Outing to Mt Alexander

Saturday March 12 was a sunny but rather blustery day, which didn't promise a good day for birding, but the outing to Nigel Harland's place and Whisky Gully proved to be very rewarding. Two of the ladies sat out of the wind on the verandah while the rest of the group went in cars up to the start of the excursion at the track which leads into the school pine plantation and the ruin of the silkworm farm. There seems to be several stories concerning the farm, but one thing that always seems to come out is the fact that it was the first commercial enterprise exclusively for women.

Somebody was shooting rabbits somewhere down the gully when we came out of the pines into the sunshine. A few birds were around as we were still sheltered from the wind by the pines. Nigel had assured us that we would see most of our birds in the gully, not along the channel.

As we crossed the ridge into Whisky Gully we all were collecting plenty of bidgee-widgee seed heads. There was nowhere to go but through it. Ern took us to a spot he knew of where there were two Soft Tree-ferns, one only a young one. Here in the damper areas was lots of tussock grass including a Poa only found in damp areas. We headed down Whisky Gully by various routes, and it was obvious who were the ones that know the area! It is a fairly steep, very picturesque gully with views over to the east through the branches of the predominant Manna Gums.

We finally reached the water channel and had to cross it by an ingenious "box and plank" bridge set up by Nigel, and Margaret Hunter. Somebody should have been there with a video, though. I don't think we were at our most elegant!

Having reached the channel we came on lots of little birds! Redbrowed Firetails, Wrens, more White-eared Honeyeaters, Goldfinches, and Yellow-rumped Thornbills, while on the dam below us there were Little Pied Cormorants and Whitefaced Herons.

The wind was turning quite cold by this time and the walk to the car, and down to the road for some, helped warm us up. Vehicles came back to pick up the walkers and the two who stayed at the house (they were able to gleefully inform us that they had been the only ones to see the spoonbill flying over) and took us down to the School Reserve at Sutton Grange for afternoon tea. The reserve, named after Mr Albert Cox, headmaster of Sutton Grange School for many years and a keen nature lover who encouraged the childrens' interest, is a credit to the Landcare Group, of which both Margaret and Nigel are members.

Birdlist for the day

Little Pied Cormorant
White-faced Heron
Yellow Spoonbill
Peregrine Falcon
Whistling Kite
Brown Falcon
Galah
Long-billed Corella
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Crimson Rosella
Kookaburra
Welcome Swallow
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike

Superb Fairy-wren
Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Weebill
White-naped,
Yellow-faced and
White-eared Honeyeaters
✓ Spotted Pardelote
Goldfinch
Red-browed Firetail
Magpie-lark
Grey Currawong
Magpie
Australian Raven

March Bird List for 61 Hunter Street

A group of White-throated Needle-tails appeared briefly early in the month, and again for a longer period on Sunday 27th - about 6-8 in number.

For the rest there were the usual visitors .

Red-browed Finches

Goldfinches

Yellow-rumped Thornbills (with juveniles)

Spotted Pardalotes

Magpies

Silvereyes

Ravens

Crimson Rosellas

Sulphur-crested Cockatoos

New Holland Honeyeaters

Grey Currawong (Juvenile)

Eastern Spinebills

Sparrows

Yellowfaced Honeyeaters

Blackbird (one)

Red Wattlebirds

Mistletoe Bird

Your Patch of Bush

Managing flora and fauna habitat in central Victoria.

A workshop dealing with the protection and management of native flora and fauna habitats in Central Victoria, organised by the Victorian Conservation Trust for people who own a patch of bush or other natural habitat or who are interested in bushland management.

At Mandurang Hall, Mandurang Road, Mandurang on Sat. April 30 from 8.45 am to 4.30 pm. Lunch and morning and afternoon teas will be provided.

Registration and Payment is required by Friday April 15.

Costs : \$15 Individual; \$35 Family; \$10 Students/pensioners/unemployed; \$5 Children.

Keynote Address: John Landy: Former Olympian and well known Naturalist and Photographer. *The value of remnant vegetation: why we need to protect and manage it.*

Speakers and Workshops

Ian Higgins: Revegetation Officer, Dept. C.N.R. *An ecological approach to weed control.*

Marilyn Sprague: Goldfields Revegetation - Bendigo's Indigenous Nursery and Wildflower Farm. *Basic seed collection and propagation.*

John Burtonclay: Chairman, Mammal Survey Group, Bendigo FNC. *Providing wildlife habitat in small remnants of bushland.*

Registration forms and further information from Rita Mills or Ern Perkins.

Buffalo Walk

Tatra Inn - the Mount Buffalo Alpine Lodge for skiers and summer visitors - is the centre for several interesting walks around the "Horn" area. This is the highest point on the Plateau at 1720 metres and the end of the sealed road. The walking tracks cross the snow grass plains and sod tussock country to rocky outcrops and Snowgum woodlands. We

Great Dividing Trail Walks

Sun April 20 Three Lost Childrens' Walk (15km)

Start at 10 am from the Lost Childrens' Reserve (near corner of Midland Highway and Central Springs Road), Daylesford, via Sailor's Creek, Sailor's Spring and Falls (lunch), Hogan's Lane, Paddock and Star tracks, Specimen Hill Dam, Cockatoo Creek Track to Wombat Creek Dam.

Finishing Point/Car ShufflePoint : 9 a.m. at Wombat Creek Dam, 8 km SE of Daylesford via East Street and Wombat Dam Road. Leaders Pat Conroy, Joel Jackson.

This "Walk into History" retraces much of the tragic trail walked by three children who perished in 1867. It is being arranged and advertised jointly with DCNR as one of the events of the Victorian Heritage Festival.

Sat 14 May Creswick Water walk (18km)

Starting 9.30am from Slatey Creek No.1 Picnic Ground (via Turnoff 1 km east of Creswick on the Melbourne /Creswick Road) via Blue Lagoon, St George's Lake, mining races to the Koala Park, Eaton's Dam, Cosgrave Reservoir, W.G.Spence's home site in Jackass Gully, via the School of Forestry to finish at the Creswick Land Care Centre

Finishing Point/9am car Shuffle Point: Creswick Land Care Centre. Leader Joel Jackson.

Sun 29 May Hepburn Loop (7 km)

Starting from, and finishing at, Hepburn Springs General Store. Starting time 1.30pm.

Sun 26 June Gold Country Walk (18 Km) (repeated by popular request in reverse direction to the 1993 walk) Vaughan Springs to Castlemaine. Fuller details later.

Sat 6 Aug Winter Inter Forest Walk . Creswick Forest to Wombat Forest; Slatey Creek to Wombat Station. Details Later.

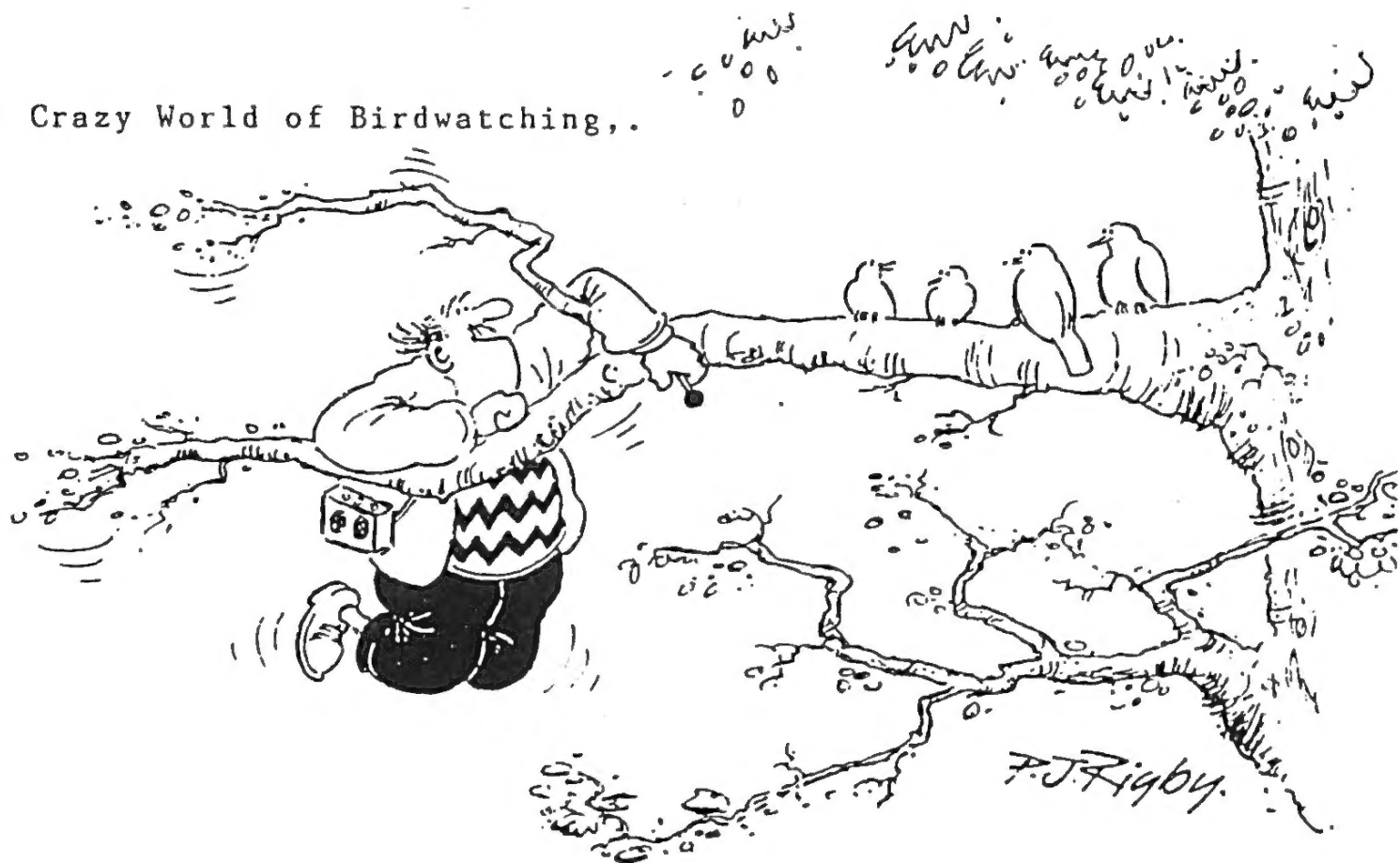
Sun 11 Sept Middle Lerdererg Walk. O'Briens Crossing to Mount Blackwood. Details later.

Sat 8 Oct "Over the Top" Walk . Daylesford to Nolan's Camp over the Great Dividing Range. Details Later.

Sun 30 Oct Great Railway Walk. This walk may dovetail with plans by the Ballarat Rail Promotion Group for a "Celebration of Railways". Details and confirmation later.

We have joined the Great /Dividing trail as a Club, but if you would like to join as an individual the annual subscription is \$15, which includes the quarterly Newsletters. The address is Great Dividing trail, P.O. Box 429, Daylesford, 3460. Next meeting is at the lower town Hall in Daylesford on Thursday April 14. The June meeting is on the 26th, same Venue.

FROM: Crazy World of Birdwatching, .



*"For goodness sake will someone tweet or he'll be here
all day."*

took the trail to the spectacular "Back Wall" below the Horn, first traversed by Baron von Mueller in 1853. It is rich in alpine flora and as my botanical knowledge is so limited I have relied on the excellent book on this subject by Costin, Gray, Totterdell and Wimbush to identify just a few of the more common plants on our path.

First the Mountain Gentians, of which there were extensive communities in the swampy areas. They have beautiful white crocus-like flowers which opened up as the day advanced to show delicate mauve veins inside. Everlastings were common, from the large golden variety and button type to the Alpine Podelepis with large fleshy leaves and golden flower heads.

Scaley Button predominated in damp areas, and a creeping form of goodenia (*Hederacea alpestris*, according to the book). Mountain Baekeas were in full bloom on damp rocky sites and along the small crystal clear streams, where many shoals of small fish darted about. The Grass Trigger-plants were on the wane, but there were still occasional deep pink blooms on some as we entered the Snow Gum belt. Tasman Flax-lily also flourished here - the large handsome fruits still at the green stage. Waxy Bluebells were common as were patches of a mauve brachchome similar to those grown in home gardens. There were one or two sightings of Royal Grevillea with a few orange/red flowers, in the Snow Gum understory.

A small clump of deep lilac flowers, which at first sight resembled a lush prostanthera in miniature, was seen occasionally, and was identified as *Euphrasia collina*.

As we approached the Back Wall country there were large areas of Snow Gum which had died off and were regenerating from the base. We were told that a fire had swept up the steep mountainside in 1985, having originated from a tobacco kiln at Myrtleford. The regeneration growth had reached about 3-4 feet in the 9 years since the disaster.

The birdlife in the area was disappointing, apart from the Flame Robins which perched on the verandah rail outside out window in the early morning. In the Snow Gum country we saw a pair of Eastern Rosellas and a solitary Eastern Spinebill, and heard a Grey Shrike-thrush calling and a Lyrebird in one of the swamper areas in the woodland understory.

At the parking area near the Chalet, where we called in to walk to the underground river on our way up, there were large numbers of "free-loading" Crimson Rosellas and ravens being fed by the visitors. The ravens in turn were feeding many juveniles - some had two offspring to cope with and the noise of rosellas and ravens competing for the scraps was overwhelming. Before returning to Bright on Sunday we had an early morning walk to Dickson's Falls, which cascade down the face of the plateau, with superb views of the Buckland Valley below.

Shirley Parnaby.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

*Excursions leave promptly at the times stated.

Fri April 8 Islands and Seabirds. Speaker is Mike Carter. 8pm at Junior Campus C.S.C., Lawson Pde. (Ex High School)

Sat April 9 Environmental Survey of some Local Public Reserves.
Leader, Chris Morris.

April 11-15 B.O.C. camp at Maldon. Maggie Oliver would like to see some club members at the camp on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday for all day outings. Contact Maggie for details and each day's plans.

Fri May 13 Paddling to Papua New Guinea Katie Reid.

Sat May 14 Mt Cameron to Mt Greenock. Part of the Major Mitchell Trail. Birds and exploring. Leader, Rita Mills. Leave old S.E.C. at 1.30pm.

Fri June 10 A Bushwalker's View of Tasmania Athol Dorman

Sat June 11 Environmental Survey Pt 2. Leave outside 13 Mostyn St (old SEC) at 1.30pm. Leader Chris Morris

Fri July 8 Four Seasons in Hampshire.

Fri Aug 12 Western Australia. Winston Huggins

Sun Sept 4 Little Whipstick All day excursion to Mt Edgerton area with Ballarat F.N.C.. Meet cr. Daylesford/Geelong Rd, old Western Hwy, 10.30am.

Fri Sept 9 Northern Australia. Pat Bingham.

Sun Oct 2 Victorian F.N.C. outing to Castlemaine, taking in Kalimna, the Botanical Gardens and Kaweka. Meet at ¼ to 11 at the Market.

Sat Nov 19 Peacock Track. All day excursion to Talbot/Amhurst area with Maryborough FNC

U.3.A./C.F.N.C. Birdwatching

Thurs Apr 21. Meet Cont. Ed. car park Templeton St at 9.30am. Leader R. Mills

Thurs May 19 Meet as above.

Great Dividing Trail Walks - see inside

Committee: B. Maund (Pres.), B Envall. (V.P.), M. Willis (Sec.), G. Broadway (Treas.), K. Turner (Prog.), R. Mills (P.O. and N/L Ed.) E. Perkins, S Parnaby, C. Morris, K. Meehan, M. Hunter and S. Bruton.

Meetings: Second Friday each month (except Jan) at the Junior Campus C.S.C., Lawson Pde. at 8 pm. Business meetings are held on the 4th Thursday (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell St. at 7.30pm,

All Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions 1994 Ordinary Membership: Single \$14, Fam. \$20

Pensioner/Student: Single \$10, Family \$16. Supporting: \$25

Newsletter posted: Membership + \$6

Please check that your Sub has been paid.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club inc.,
P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine. 3450